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A NEWSLETTER FOR THE TEXAS TRAVEL INDUSTRY

COMING UP

The **Burleson County Czech Heritage Museum in Caldwell** kicked off fund-raising efforts last month for the restoration of the **Polasek House**, the museum's future home. The museum's restoration committee will raise money through corporate sponsorships and a variety of fund-raising events. The 1863 home lies one block south of the Presidential Corridor, tracing Texas 21, that links the Lyndon B. Johnson Library and Museum in Austin with the George Bush Library in College Station. Call **Lee Crawford** at 409/535-8187 for details.

Travelers motoring down the I-35 corridor can soon reap the benefits of the **New Braunfels Visitor Center** when it opens at its new location this spring. Work has begun on the renovation and restructuring of a house on Post Road, just off the interstate, where C&VB officials hope to attract more walk-in visitors than in previous years. The project, originally scheduled for completion in late 1997, will open before Memorial Day weekend to help capture more business during the peak summer months. For more information, call 210/625-2385.

Texas' tallest scream machine will premiere next month at **Six Flags AstroWorld in Houston**. **Dungeon Drop** uses state-of-the-art technology to create a thrilling free-fall effect from a giant 230-foot tower. Six-passenger cars are pulled straight up into the air, before making their plunge into medieval adventure, complete with Merlin's Labor-

atory, the King's Armory and the cryptic Dungeon. Guests are then lifted more than 20 stories high before plummeting in free-fall back to earth. For ticket information, call 713/799-1234.

PLACES

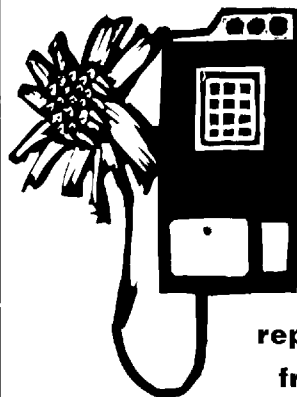
It's been a little more than a year since Ralph the Swimming Pig retired from Aquarena Springs in **San Marcos**. *The Austin American-Statesman* reports since February 1996, when Southwest Texas State University closed theme park attractions at the former resort, the new **Aquarena Center** has moved quickly and easily into its new role as a facility for natural science research and education. A video arcade has been replaced by aquariums for endangered salamander and fish species found only in San Marcos Springs. A warehouse is being converted into an archaeological laboratory. Where Ralph once swam, archaeologists are learning special scuba diving techniques for underwater

sites. Free admission; paid tours available on archaeology, ecology, endangered species, botany and bird-watching. Open daily, 9 a.m. to dusk, at One Aquarena Springs Drive. Call 512/245-7534 for details.

For many, childhood memories conjure up images of model trains, winding in and out and round and round tiny villages. Not so for **Harrold Little**. According to *The Dallas Morning News*, he never gave much thought to trains. At least not until age 70, when his wife brought home a Santa Fe diesel engine, complete with two cars, a caboose and an oval 18-inch track, found on special for just \$17.50 at Brookshire's Country Store in Tyler. Within five years, Harrold's collection had grown to 1,000 cars. So in 1994, he built a 50-by-32-foot structure in his backyard and started welcoming visitors to **Harrold's Model Train Museum** on Lavender Road in Tyler. Most of the impressive 1,500-car stock lines the walls. Other trains roll on 300

feet of track, past bridges, industrial structures, depots, homes, farmland, a carnival, a circus and little people. Open Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Sunday, 1-5 p.m.; admission \$2.50. Call 903/531-9404 for more info.

The **Austin & Texas Central Railroad** added another bit of turn-of-the-century nostalgia last month with the inaugural run of the **River City Flyer**. Locomotive No. 786 brought steam engine travel back to downtown Austin with the addition of a route from Fourth and Red River streets. For now the new route is available only by charter, though officials hope to establish regularly scheduled trips sometime this month. The 80-year-old relic becomes the *Hill Country Flyer* on weekends, when she carries passengers between nearby Cedar Park and Burnet. Some Saturday evenings, she's renamed the *Twilight Flyer*, traveling between Cedar Park and Liberty Hill. For information on all three Flyer routes call 512/477-8468. Or



FLORA AND PHONE-A The Travel and Information Division's new automated system makes it easy for wildflower-lovers to check on the best viewing areas along Texas' colorful roadways. To get the latest spring scoop, call TxDOT's 1-800 number for a statewide wildflower overview and forecast, followed by a menu of seven regional reports. Reports are updated daily, with assistance from TxDOT's district offices, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the National Park Service. Call 1-800-452-9292 to find the what and the where of Texas in bloom.

TRAVEL TALES OVERHEARD

stop by the Austin Steam Train Association's office in the Driskill Hotel, 116 E. Sixth Street, in Austin.

DART's light rail system extended its service from downtown **Dallas** six miles to Park Lane. The new **North Central Extension** enters a three-and-a-half mile subway that courses underneath North Central Expressway, coming back into daylight at Mockingbird Lane, then continuing with stops at Lovers and Park lanes. This latest addition is part of DART's 20-mile starter system that began serving passengers last June. The service provides easy access to area attractions, including the Arts District, the West End Historic District, Old City Park, Farmers Market, the Dallas Convention Center and the Dallas Zoo. The rail operates seven days a week from 5:30 a.m. to 12:30 a.m.; single ride, \$1, round trip, \$2.

San Antonio has the Alamo. Irving has the Cowboys. Houston has NASA. And **Round Rock** has **doughnuts**—strangely orange-yellow glazed goodies more famous than the rock or the outlaw Sam Bass himself. For 70 years, people have been lining up at **Lone Star Bakery** for their share of the 500 dozen or so sold each day. Travelers, fresh off the frenzied I-35, are seen wandering

TEXAS TRAVEL LOG

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Ann Kelton, Editor

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Layout: Jane Yansky Design

TEXARKANA TIC He couldn't wait to call in his ideas to the State of Texas so implementation could begin ASAP. We need to position milking machines along the Texas coast, he said, so the whales can just swim up to them, be milked and then be on their way. The state could then market the milk for its many healthful qualities. While counselor Sonya Youngless listened attentively, she couldn't help but wonder if someone had forgotten to tell her that the toll-

free line had been extended past the U.S. and Canadian borders to the planets beyond.

WASKOM TIC Bryan Humphreys stopped in for a peek at the March issue of *Texas Highways* magazine, where he's mentioned in a feature article on the Legends of the Game Baseball Museum and Learning Center at The Ballpark in Arlington. When Bryan's not teaching kids in the classroom, he's coaching kids at the

Learning Center, helping them link museum activities with what they're learning at school.

Danny Garcia had walked more than 125 miles when he entered the center on March 20, the day of his 52nd birthday. No, he wasn't looking for a ride, but just taking a break from a Faith Walk from Alexandria, Louisiana, to Oklahoma City to promote and draw awareness to children's rights and world peace.

around aimlessly, looking for the whereabouts of those Texas treats. Owner **Dale Cohrs** said the secret to success is the made-from-scratch dough and fresh eggs. And, no, he's never done a fat-content analysis, claiming he doesn't want to know. Open Tuesday through Sunday, 4:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., at 106 W. Liberty Street. Yum.

Sea Center Texas in Lake Jackson reopened March 8, after shutting down visitor operations for nearly six months to facilitate maintenance and repairs. The \$13-million marine hatchery, aquarium and education center first opened to the public in March of last year, quickly becoming a major attraction for visitors and local citizens. Visitor appeal centers around its interpretive displays, a touch tank and five large aquariums. At the intersection of Plantation Drive and Medical Drive. For more info, call 1-800-792-1112.

A frustrated group of tourists arrived at the **Asian Cultures Museum & Educational Center** in **Corpus Christi** lugging a copy of TxDOT's *Texas State Travel Guide*. The guide gave directions to Peoples Street, so it took some doing to find the museum's brand-new quarters at 1809 N. Chaparral. Director

Nancy Stevens was delighted to find her attraction in the guide, and contacted us immediately to let us in on the change. Since the museum opened in 1974 as The Japanese Art Museum, its size and scope have expanded to include artifacts from India, China, Korea, the Philippines and Vietnam. The nonprofit institution offers exhibits, classes and workshops on Asian culture, language and crafts. An extensive collection of books on a diverse array of Asian subjects will be located on the second floor of the new facility when construction is complete. For further information, call 512/882-2641.

For years New Braunfels has been a hot spot for tourists. Its serene beauty, historic structures, German culture, river resorts and myriad museums capture the attention of the young and young at heart. Once again New Braunfels has taken the lead by offering a growing number of historic inns and local homes with overnight accommodations and home-cooked meals. The city's latest endeavor has prompted the start-up of the **New Braunfels Bed & Breakfast Association**, offering the seclusion of separate cottages and the hospitality of private homes. For information or reservations, call 1-800-572-2626.

AS GOOD AS GOAL San Antonio will host the 1997 Big 12 football championship game on December 6, when winners of the league's north and south divisions will square off in the Alamodome. Big 12 associate commissioner Donnie Duncan said the bid was awarded based on finances, San Antonio's reputation as a great destination city and the positive experiences of Big 12 teams in the Alamo Bowl.



HISTORY

In 1598, Don Juan de Oñate gathered his followers for a banquet of fish, duck and geese from the Rio Grande—23 years before the Pilgrims sat down to their turkey feast. Now they've finally done it! After years and years of tireless enthusiasm, the **El Paso Mission Trail Association** has convinced publishers to include El Paso's **First Thanksgiving** story in textbooks for schoolchildren. In December, Houghton Mifflin Schoolbook Publishing Company contacted the association asking for information and photos for inclusion in their new bilingual book. More recently, Harcourt Brace Publishing Company sent a copy of their latest textbook carrying the Oñate story, and conveyed plans to include this part of history in all their textbooks soon. The achievement is a direct result of the association's annual participation at the National Conference for Social Studies and their consistent lobbying of major book publishers. They are now working with legislators to require inclusion of El Paso's story in future history books.

The **Texas Historical Commission** reports a three-year project to develop a database of more than 250,000 historic and prehistoric sites in Texas is almost halfway complete. The **Texas Historic Sites Atlas** will provide comprehensive information on archaeological sites, historical markers, Texas museums and other historical subjects, and will include topographical maps and thousands of color images. Most of the information will be delivered through the commission's web site, which already offers a sampling of things to come. The project is scheduled for completion sometime in 1998. For further updates, key in <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/>.

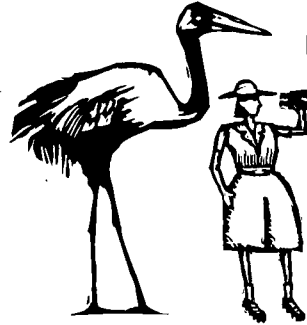
WILDLIFE

More than **300 bald eagles** wintered on 22 Texas lakes this year, a 23 percent increase over 1996. With the help of volunteers, the **Texas Parks and Wildlife Department** coordinates the annual mid-winter survey to compare and track wintering population trends. Sitings show bald eagle populations have made such a comeback that in August 1995 the magnificent bird was officially down-listed from endangered to threatened within the lower 48 states. The return of the bald eagle to Texas has spurred the development of eagle tours and festivals in areas with high winter concentrations, increasing public aware-



What was the result of the Battle of San Jacinto?

If you're right. As the final military event of the Texas Revolution, the Battle of San Jacinto, fought April 21, 1836, marked the freedom of Texas from the Mexican government and the beginning of the short-lived Republic of Texas. But the battle also ignited far-reaching results that changed the power and magnitude of the United States. The freedom of Texas led to annexation and the Mexican War. This, in turn, resulted in the acquisition by the U.S. of the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, California, Utah and parts of Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas and Oklahoma—almost one-third of the present area of the U.S. An inscription on the exterior base of the San Jacinto Monument reads, "Measured by its results, San Jacinto was one of the decisive battles of the world. . . ."



EYE ON THE PRIZE Bird-watchers are flocking to the coast to compete in the first-ever **Great Texas Birding Classic**, April 19-26. The event covers the **Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail**, which stretches along the entire 624 miles of Texas Gulf Coast. **Birding teams will try to spot as many of the area's 400 species as possible for a \$50,000 grand prize, going to a bird conservation project of the winning team's choice. For details, call 512/389-4427 or 1-888-892-4737.**

ness and generating eco-tourism dollars in local economies throughout the state.

The **Texas Parks and Wildlife Department** is taking a fresh approach toward **wildlife conservation** by offering to pay landowners to help preserve threatened or endangered species. The flexibility of the program will allow landowners to safeguard rare species through habitat improvements and protection while still engaging in traditional land management practices such as farming and ranching. Officials said since 97 percent of the land in Texas is privately owned, rare species conservation will either succeed or fail on private land. For details, call the TP&WD Endangered Resources Branch at 512/912-7011.

THE ARTS

The **Texas Commission on the Arts** was joined by the First Lady of Texas for a two-day tour promoting the State of the Arts license plate and the importance

of arts in education. **Mrs. Laura Bush** and TCA commissioners held press conferences in **Pharr, Del Rio, Abilene, Irving and Texarkana**. The cities were selected based on arts and cultural activities, past TCA support, size, geographic location and media markets.

MUSEUMS

For the first time since its inception 48 years ago, the **Texas Watercolor Society's** annual exhibition will open outside of San Antonio. The **Museum of the Southwest in Midland** will showcase 91 select works by U.S. and Canadian artists, May 17 through June 22. Artist **Katherine Chang Liu**, who juried the 721 entries, said the Texas exhibition is comparable to the three other national shows in both quality and number. The exhibition is partially funded by the Arts Assembly of Midland and the Texas Commission on the Arts. Open Tuesday through Sunday at 1705 W. Missouri Avenue. Call 915/683-2882 for details.

TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Percent Variation*	Visitors Year-to-date	Percent Variation*
Amarillo	16,041	+25.58	35,706	+4.93
Anthony	15,717	-15.89	43,269	-14.76
Denison	20,754	+7.72	49,557	+6.64
Gainesville	34,308	-4.37	78,846	-5.75
Langtry	11,589	-25.25	26,289	-25.66
Laredo	6,717	-60.27	18,924	-55.97
Orange	43,668	-40.93	114,258	-37.54
Texarkana	35,100	-31.69	91,017	-31.08
Valley	43,116	+24.39	170,469	+4.84
Waskom	63,462	+6.01	144,234	+3.18
Wichita Falls	19,899	+6.61	45,798	-3.81
Capitol Complex	11,787	+8.57	25,395	-3.77
1-800 Phone Center	9,300	-20.68	26,523	-34.19
CENTER TOTALS	331,458	-12.80	870,285	-15.09

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*Compared to last year

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